

Audio Transcript: United States Department of Justice Community Relations Service

<http://www.justice.gov/crs>

**Improving Cultural Competence – Engaging and Building Relationships with Arab and American Muslims
09/08/2014**

Abed Ayoub: Welcome to the United States Department of Justice Community Relations Services Cultural Competency Presentation: Engaging and Building Relations with Arab and Muslim-Americans. My name is Abed Ayoub from the American-Arab anti-discrimination committee. One of the many partner organizations that works with the DOJ Community Relations Service to further cultural professionalism.

This training will provide facts, insights, and recommendations to assist law enforcement officers in understanding, effectively engaging, and protecting Arab and American Muslim community members. This training pertains to non-emergency, non-hostile situations. The presentation is intended to support law enforcements role in protecting and serving communities in non-emergency circumstances.

It has two objectives, the first objective is to educate law enforcement officers in order to increase understanding. The second objective is to give law enforcement the tools necessary to successfully engage with American Muslim and Arab-American communities in order to establish mutually beneficial relationships, and better serve the respective communities.

Over the past 50 years the religious landscape of the United States has dramatically changed due in part to increased immigration and population growth. It is difficult to determine approximate populations of different religions in the country, as religion is considered a private matter and is not required to be disclosed as part of the United States Census. The diversification of faiths along with the changes in ethnic and racial populations has created new challenges for law enforcement officers of all levels and effectively and respectfully engaging the communities they serve.

Muslims and Arabs are multicultural multi-lingual and live in countries all over the world. While the words Arab and Muslim are frequently used as synonyms, the terms denote two different concepts. An Arab is a person who can trace his ancestral roots to one of the 22 Arabic-speaking countries known as the League of Arab States, while a Muslim is a person who practices the religion of Islam. In fact in the United States a majority of Arabs are Christian. There are approximately 52 Muslim-majority nations currently in the world today. While there may be some Arabic Muslims, Arabs are religiously diverse.

American Muslims have served as proud members of our nation's military since the Revolutionary War. It is estimated that there are currently over 4,000 declared Muslim-Americans serving in the United States military today. Notable Muslims who have served in the United States military include Ali Soufan who was the lead investigator into the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000 and played a pivotal role in identifying the terrorists responsible for the attacks of September 11. Kareem Rashad Sultan Kahn, a member the United States Army who was killed in combat on August 6, 2007 in Iraq. He was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart for his service. In World War 1 nearly 14,000 Arab-Americans served. In World War Two over 15,000 Arab-Americans served, Arab-Americans were the highest percentage of any ethnic group serving the United States military during World War Two.

Currently there are about 3,500 Arab-Americans in the military. Notable Arab-Americans who have served in the military include George Joulwan United States Army from 1966 to 1997. Emily Hajar United States Navy from 1943 to 1945. Faye Glenn Abdellah United States Public Health Service Commission Corp deputy Surgeon General 1949 to 1989.

Despite the sacrifices that many Arabs and Muslims have made for their country there has been a reported increase the number of hate crimes and bias based incidence targeting the Arab and Muslim community members over the past ten years. Many factors have contributed to this proliferation including what is referred to as Islamophobia. Islamophobia is defined by the Center for American Progress as exaggerated fear, hatred and hostility toward Islam and Muslims perpetrated by negative stereotypes resulting in biased discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion of Muslims from America's social political and civic life. Islamophobia also impacts those that are perceived to be Muslim such as Arabs, Sikhs and Hindus and South Asians. Islamophobia similar to any other kind of bigotry and hatred such as homophobia and anti-Semitism.

Islamophobia and the lack of exposure to Muslims in the Arab culture and beliefs, has led to a climate of fear and suspicion that has adversely impacted the respective communities. According to a 2011 Gallup poll sixty percent of American Muslims have faced prejudice due to their appearance or beliefs. A separate Gallup poll in 2009 reported that while American Muslims reported strong per capita economic well-being in the United States, they are the least likely religious group to self-report as thriving. Despite this environment Arab and Muslim-Americans strive to be part of the mainstream society and cherish mainstream American values such as freedom, democracy and equality. For example, eighty-nine percent of community members regularly vote. Despite high rates of victimization American Arabs and Muslims strive to be part of the mainstream society and value widely-held American ideals including freedom, democracy, and equality. An overwhelming majority of Arab and Muslim Americans are law-abiding citizens and patriots, share a commitment to a secure America, identify with American values and culture. For a majority of Arab and Muslims living in America their religion provides a moral and ethical framework for a living.

We'll now spend a few minutes reviewing the basic tenets of Islam to familiarize you with the fundamental beliefs and practices of Muslims in order to more effectively engage the American Muslim communities. Cultural competence requires knowing the facts about the faith to understand and effectively engage with the community. Islam shares many beliefs with Christianity and Judaism. All three religions hold that there is one God, who is the creator of all life. Muslims refer to this God as Allah, Allah also means God in Arabic and Arab Christians and Arab Jews will also use the word Allah for God. Christianity, Judaism and Islam also believe in many of the same prominent religious figures including Adam, Eve, Abraham, Noah, Moses, Mary, and Jesus. Islam derives its prophetic lineage from Abraham and recognizes nearly every prophet of the Old Testament. The Koran has an entire chapter named after the Virgin Mary which describes the birth, teachings, and miracles of Jesus as well as his Second Coming. Followers of Islam believe in the revelation in many of the holy books recognized by other faiths. For instance, Muslims believe in Moses Torah, The Psalms of David, and the Gospel of Jesus in addition to the Koran as revealed to Muhammad. Like other holy text the Koran contains stories of prophets and teachers moral and ethics and provides spiritual guidance.

While Islam is similar to Christianity and Judaism in many regards it is important to recognize it as a distinct religion. Islam has five core beliefs known as the Five Pillars of Islam. The first pillar which is Shahadah, is the belief that Muslims recognize one God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God. The second pillar which is Salat, or prayer, Muslims pray five times a day at set times. These times correspond to dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. These prayer sessions are believed to be a direct link to God. Muslims also pray in congregations every Friday and on special holidays. The third pillar which is Sawm, is known as fast. During the holy month of Ramadan Muslim's will fast from sunrise to sunset abstaining from food, water, and sex. The fourth pillar of Islam is known as Zakat and this is the requirement for Muslims to give to charity. Muslims are required to donate 2.5 percent of their surplus wealth annually to those less fortunate than themselves. The fifth pillar of Islam is Hajj, this is the requirement that all Muslims at least once in their life take the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Mecca is a holy site in the Islamic faith, Muslims believe it is where Abraham laid the first stone for a house of worship and where Muhammad was born. The pilgrimage is required only of those who can

afford it financially and physically. Approximately three million Muslims journey to Saudi Arabia each year to visit Mecca during Hajj.

The word Islam denotes the religion and comes from the Arabic word *slim* meaning peace. It is pronounced with a hard 'S,' as in 'Sam,' as opposed to a soft 'S' or 'Z' sound. The word Muslim refers to a person who practices or identifies with the religion of Islam. Koran is the holy book of all Muslims, like the Gospels, and the Torah. The word Masjid mosque denotes the Muslim place of religious worship and education. It is similar to a church or temple in other faiths. There are 1.5 billion Muslims around the world. The universal greeting in Islam is "as-salamu alaykum" or "peace be with you." Use this greeting when first approaching a Muslim-American and introducing yourself.

The Koran is the Muslim holy text. Muslims believe that the book contains God's literal word and consider it to be sacred. As with holy books of all faiths it is important show respect and reverence for the Koran. The Koran should never be placed on the floor nor should it have any other items or texts stacked on top of it. If there is a need for law enforcement to handle the Koran it should be promptly given back to its owner once that need has passed. It is common for Muslims to keep the Koran in their car, locker, gym bag, suitcases, or on their self. The Koran just like other religious texts can be a target of hate crimes.

A mosque, or a Masjid, is a Muslim house of prayer it is similar to churches, synagogues, and temples of other faiths and should be treated with like reverence. It's best to use the same respectful demeanor for entering a mosque as you would a church or a synagogue. Muslims often go to mosques based on convenience and proximity congregations are often ethnically mixed based on commitment and engagement to a particular mosque. In the United States mosques frequently service community centers or lectures, workshops, classes, dinners and other community functions occur. However it should not be assumed that everyone in a congregation knows everyone else. Muslims frequently attend one or several mosques again based on proximity or convenience. Mosques are often most well-attended during Friday prayers, Sunday services, holidays, and other festivities such as Eid al-Fitr which marks the end of Ramadan. Women and men pray in separate spaces and Muslim men and women may be more comfortable interfacing with an officer of the same gender. When entering a mosque be aware of prayer areas and avoid stepping on prayer rugs with your shoes on or walking in front of those who are praying.

Friday is the day of congregational prayer in Islam, each Friday prayer occurs between 12-2pm. Muslim worshipers are frequently hurried to return to their places of work and law enforcement may be called upon to regulate traffic and parking to ensure members are able to worship. Similar requests for law enforcement may be made during other busy times at the mosques, such as Eid al-Fitr and other prayer services. It is important to remember that not every Muslim prays five times a day or at all. Like followers of other religions individual Muslims vary in their religious observance.

As stated earlier in this presentation it is important to remember that Muslims are multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-racial. They represent the highest level of ethnic racial and cultural diversity of any other recognized religion. In the United States African-Americans make up the majority of the Muslim-American community, followed by South Asian and then Arab-American. It is for these reasons profoundly based on name and appearance is nearly impossible and is an ineffective strategy for law enforcement officers.

Islam requires that Muslims, both men and women, dress in a conservative manner. A Muslims interpretation of modest dress varies in accordance with the cultural and individual. Some Muslim women may choose to wear loose attire and cover their hair or face with a hijab or head scarf, while others may choose not to do so, this is an individual choice. Similarly some Muslim men may grow their beards and wear a cap called a kufi to show

their modesty, whereas other Muslim man may choose not to do so. Oftentimes Muslims may be more formal and have a modest demeanor with members of the opposite sex. In some situations some men and women may not shake hands with members of the opposite sex. As with other races and creeds it is best to avoid making assumptions regarding identity, nationality, or political affiliation, or culture simply based on the appearance or mannerisms of Muslim-Americans.

We will now learn how to successfully engage Arab-American and Muslim American communities in order to increase trust and communication and form long-lasting relationships. When law enforcement officers engage with the communities they serve it creates an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust that encourages communities to cooperate when necessary and assists officers in performing their duties. Conversely mistrust and lack of communication leads to under-reporting of crimes intimidation and refusal to work together to create a better safer society for all. The justice department has emphasized outreach to the Arab-American and American Muslim communities. One such effort is hosting regular meetings with national leaders of Arab-American and Muslim American organizations, as well as with other community groups across the country. These meetings are one way to ensure we continue to protect against threats to our national security while building trusting, collaborative, and productive relationships that facilitate mutual understanding between certain communities and the law enforcement officials serving them. Engaging with all communities creates a win-win situation for law enforcement officials and also for the communities.

The following recommendations will help you in successfully engaging with the Arab and Muslim communities: Reflect on how your department recruits and retains officers and ensure that the entire community is reflected among your officers in terms of race, religion, ethnicity, and gender. Ensure that you alert American Muslims and Arab-American community members to job opportunities on your workforce. Develop relationships with community members this could be achieved through such programs as a citizen's police academy or working with community members in sponsoring events through local community organizations. Coordinate a community partnership strategy to work more effectively with local state and federal agencies. Coordinate town-hall meetings where you can develop these strategies with community members and hear directly from the community about how these strategies could be implemented. Highlight Arab and Muslim contributions in your community take a moment to highlight and publicize when an Arab-American or Muslim American has played a critical role in protecting our nation.

Developing a long-term mutually beneficial relationship requires the investment of time and commitment. Trust is built gradually and you should repeatedly engage with recognized community leaders including business owners, community organization representatives, and religious leaders. Invite Arab-American and Muslim American community members to participate in programs and information seminars particularly those that will increase the understanding of both law enforcement and the respective communities culture, and customs. Publicized cultural diversity training opportunities that develop community knowledge. The more information community members are exposed to the less likely they will be able to believe harmful stereotypes and misinformed rumors. Develop knowledge of the community that you are serving, if you have a liaison to work with that community ensure that liaison is investing his or her time and conveys the commitment of these recommendations to the community members. If you do not have a liaison, consider establishing a liaison to commit to these recommendations and ensure that there is always an open line of communication between your agency and the community you serve.

Listen to concerns voiced by Arab and Muslim community members and respond in an appropriate and respectful manner. Devise a system to record and track reports of discrimination and bias based incidents against Arab and Muslim community members. The Department of Justice has made modifications to the hate crimes tracking form and now hate crimes against both Arabs and Muslims respectively can be tracked. Ensure

that Arab and Muslim community members are aware of how to file complaints or hate crimes reports with law enforcement officials. Familiarize yourself with the respective communities you serve and allow community members to familiarize themselves with you by attending and participating in religious, secular, and social events. Inform Arab and Muslim community members of the law enforcement, governmental, and civil rights organizational support services that are available to them. Develop and launch mutually acceptable strategies for combating obstacles that hinder the development and maintenance of successful community law enforcement relationships.

Thank you for participating in our improving cultural competence presentation for additional information please contact the US Department of Justice Community Relations Service.